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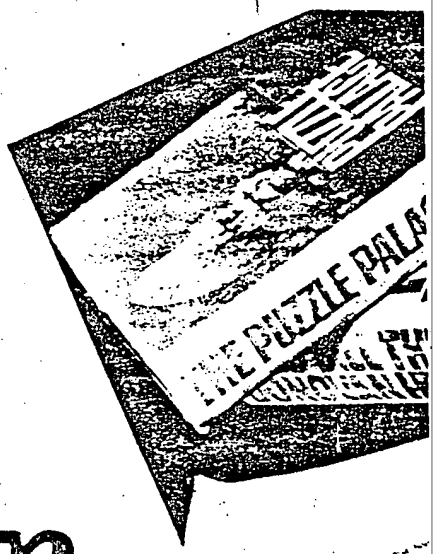
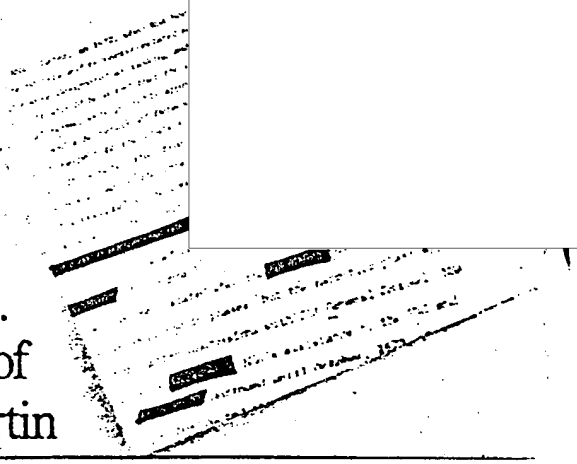
Putting Secret Puzzles Together





Intrepid Authors Such as James Bamford and Anthony Cave Brown Are Mining Declassified Documents for Best-Sellers. But Now the Government Wants Some of Its Secrets Back.

By David C. Martin

Exposing government secrets through public documents might seem a contradiction in terms. Yet that is what a growing number of dogged researchers have been doing in recent years. Articles and books on such subjects as the H-bomb and the National Security Agency—subjects considered sensitive by the government—have been researched and published without the use of a single piece of classified information—no anonymous sources, no purloined documents. Their success has not only upset some of the government's secret-keepers, it has led the Reagan administration to reconsider its handling of sensitive information, and even to attempt to get some material now in the public domain back under wraps.

A spectacular job of piecing together information is James Bamford's book, *The Puzzle Palace*, about America's Big Ear, the National Security Agency. It details the internal organization and worldwide installations of NSA from the Cray 1 computer in the basement of the headquarters building at Fort Meade to listening posts in such obscure locations as Sugar Grove, West Virginia, and Two Rock R

A former deputy director of NSA has denounced the book as "very damaging, very damaging," because as far as NSA is concerned, anything that confirms its existence is damaging. Yet Bamford has not exposed any classified information; the interviews were on the record, and the documents were found in libraries or released under the Freedom of Information Act.

Bamford's ability to drag NSA out of the closet demonstrates that even the most secret bureaucracy leaves a paper trail that can be followed. His first find, for example, came at the George C. Marshall Research Foundation in Lexington, Virginia. Going through the papers of the late William Friedman, one of the pioneers of American cryptology and the man who—to no avail—broke the Japanese diplomatic code prior to Pearl Harbor, Bamford found an unclassified NSA newsletter published for "NSA employees and their families," according to the logo.

The phrase "and their families" was Bamford's key to NSA. Until then, his requests for information had been stymied by a 1959 law which states that the agency is not required to release infor-

tuted a waiver of the law. If the newsletter could be distributed to relatives of NSA employees, Bamford reasoned, it could be distributed to him.

NSA relented, and Bamford spent a week at Fort Meade poring over 6,000 pages of newsletters dating back to 1952. Although "sensitive" information had been blacked out, Bamford waded through all the trivia about the promotions, retirements, transfers, and hobbies of NSA employees—an eye-glazing enterprise, which apparently had proved too much for the censors. Bamford found that names blacked out in headlines appeared unmasked in the body of the story. An obituary of one NSA employee noted that he had once been stationed in Yakima, Washington, alerting Bamford to the existence of a major listening complex tucked away in the vastness of an Army firing range.

After he had wrung the 6,000 pages dry, Bamford threatened to force NSA to provide him with the blacked-out information. Knowing it would lose, NSA cut a deal, providing him with the agency's table of organization in return for a promise not to sue for the remaining tid-